

# **Television and Anti-immigrant Sentiments. The Mediating Role of Fear of Crime and Perceived Ethnic Diversity**

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## **Abstract**

Previous research has established a strong correlation between fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments. In this paper, we explore the role of television in explaining individual differences in fear of crime, perceived ethnic diversity and levels of anti-immigrant sentiments. We use the ‘Social Cohesion Indicators in Flanders’ (SCIF) data, a representative survey in the Flemish region of Belgium, combined with real life indicators of ethnic diversity and crime at the community level. Results of a multilevel Structural Equation Model (SEM) suggest that watching television is positively associated with fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity, which in turn is associated with anti-immigrant sentiments. Preference for public television is, however, associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime levels. Real crime and ethnic diversity levels are only weakly related to anti-immigrant sentiments. We conclude that especially perceptions are important in influencing anti-immigrant sentiments and that television plays a substantial role in shaping these perceptions.

**Key words:** Television, Anti-immigrant Sentiments, Fear of Crime, Crime, Perceived Ethnic Diversity

As the ethnic composition of western societies is becoming increasingly diverse, the immigration debate has moved toward the centre of numerous public and political discussions (Kriesi et al., 2012). The anti-immigrant rhetoric of radical right-wing parties associates immigrants with social disorder and crime, spreading the view that immigration is out of control and disrupts Western societies (Rydgren, 2008). Fear of crime and race-related stereotypes on crime contribute are instrumental in spreading negative attitudes toward ethnic minority groups (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997). The mass media are seen as contributing to anti-immigrant sentiments, partly through the salience of stories about immigration and integration-related issues (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Schemer, 2012, forthcoming; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013). Crime constitutes a popular ingredient on television news (Iyengar & Gilliam, 2000) and crime stories – especially violent ones – are often racially biased (Dixon & Azocar, 2006; Dixon & Linz, 2000). The way television frames the relation between ethnic diversity and crime can thus be expected to impact anti-immigrant attitudes, especially as many majority group members – by lack of direct contact experiences – heavily rely on the mass media as an information source about minorities (Fujioka, 1999). The racial priming of crime on television has been shown to be related to attitudes towards minorities (Mastro, Lapinski, Kopacz, & Behm-Morawitz, 2009; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Welch, 2007) and the salience of the immigration debate may lead public opinion to judge immigration as an important problem and to overestimate immigration statistics (Dunaway, Branton, Abrajano, & Diego, 2010). Little research, however, has been conducted to investigate the mechanisms through which television impacts anti-immigrant sentiments. In this study we investigate how television influences anti-immigrant sentiments both directly and indirectly, and whether perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime levels mediate this relation. In this way we build upon recent work suggesting that especially perceptions are important in examining evaluations of immigrants by majority group members in society (Hooghe & de Vroome, forthcoming; Raijman & Semyonov, 2004). We contribute to this debate by determining how television can be a factor in shaping these perceptions.

In this paper we make a number of contributions. First, we evaluate both the direct and indirect mechanisms through which television may influence anti-immigrant sentiments, via fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity. In order to disentangle these mechanisms, structural equation modeling is conducted. Second, we take into account

potential confounding factors such as audience traits, neighborhood characteristics and the type of television exposure. In this way we can ascertain whether the correlation between television and attitudes is robust, and holds under control for real life data on crime and ethnic diversity levels. This allows us to answer the question what matters most in explaining anti-immigrant sentiments: objective conditions, or perceptions that are partly shaped by television? Third and finally, we explicitly bring in fear of crime as an important ground underlying anti-immigrant sentiments. This factor has been understudied in Western European contexts as most research focuses on economic and cultural threat while accounting for anti-immigrant sentiments (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; McLaren, 2003), but neglects the role of fear of crime and (perceived) overrepresentation of immigrants in criminal acts (Dinas & van Spanje, 2011; Fitzgerald, Curtis, & Corliss, 2011).

The outline of the paper is as follows. First, we reflect on the theoretical background, which is based upon the idea that especially perceptions are vital in influencing attitudes towards immigrants and minorities, and we argue that television plays a substantial role in shaping these perceptions. Second, we specify our theoretical model on the direct and indirect relationships between television, perceived ethnic diversity, fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments. Third, we present our data and methods and test the hypothesized theoretical model via structural equation modeling. Finally, the implications of the results are discussed.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

Crime and fear of crime play an important role in the debate on ethnic diversity and prejudice toward ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, we know that perceptions of crime and insecurity are just as strongly influenced by media reports as by real-life indicators on the occurrence of criminal behavior. We therefore expect television exposure to have an impact on anti-immigrant sentiments, both directly and indirectly. It can be assumed that majority group members who frequently watch television will perceive ethnic diversity levels to be higher, which subsequently increases anti-immigrant sentiments. Moreover, we expect that viewers who frequently watch television will have higher levels of fear of crime, which increases anti-immigrant sentiments as well. Self-

evidently, other elements play a role in this process as well, and we will therefore investigate whether audience traits, neighborhood characteristics and the type of broadcaster condition television effects.

### **Television and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments**

Research has shown that majority group members – by lack of direct contact experiences – are largely dependent upon the mass media and television in particular as an information source about minorities and immigrants (Fujioka, 1999). While scholars agree that anti-immigrant sentiments are strongly influenced by the mass media (Allport, 1954; Ramasubramanian, 2010), the exact mechanisms through which this effect occurs are not entirely clear. The question rises whether the effect of television is direct, or rather indirect as it impacts other attitudes that subsequently shape anti-immigrant sentiments? In this paper, we investigate the mechanisms through which television exposure impacts attitudes. Research has shown that stereotypical portrayals of minorities and immigrants are widespread within media content and in this way the media can perpetuate prejudice and stereotypical beliefs in society.

Immigration and the integration of minorities have become increasingly salient issues in the mass media of Western societies (Bauder, 2008; Vliegenthart & Boomgaarden, 2007; Walgrave & De Swert, 2002). Moreover, these stories tend to be sensational in nature, and the discourse is often packed with superlatives, metaphors and container terms (Charteris-Black, 2006). Media theories on agenda setting state that public opinion will evaluate issues as more pressing and important if they are perceived to receive large media attention (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Hence, if television extensively reports on immigration-related issues, such as ethnic diversity and the social integration of ethnic minorities, this can be expected to have an effect on the perceptions of ethnic diversity among the majority population (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013). Previous studies have shown that not necessarily real ethnic diversity and out-group size are related to anti-immigrant sentiments: especially the perception of ethnic diversity plays a key role (Hooghe & de Vroome, forthcoming; Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006). Research has consistently shown, too, that often there is a large discrepancy between real and perceived ethnic diversity levels (Alba, Nee, & Nee, 2005; Gallagher, 2003).

Distorted perceptions of the level of ethnic diversity are expected to foster negative attitudes towards minorities and immigrants as these perceptions may activate feelings of threat amongst majority group members (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013; Semyonov et al., 2006). This is related to the concept of realistic threat and group conflict theory, as majority group members perceive the inflow of immigrants to have a detrimental impact on society (Schneider, 2007).

An important element of the media framing of diversity is the frequently documented presence of a racial bias in crime reports. Chiricos and Eschholz (2002, p. 408) refer to this process as “the racial and ethnic typification of crime” or the “criminal typification of race and ethnicity” on television news. Content analysis of television messages has repeatedly shown that minorities and immigrants are consistently associated with crime and law and order issues (Entman & Gross, 2008). As Barlow (1998, p. 151) summarizes it: ‘talking about crime is talking about race.’ First, with regard to the quantity of television coverage, several studies have documented that minorities are overrepresented in the role of perpetrator compared to their real presence in crime statistics (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Iyengar & Gilliam, 2000). Moreover, this overrepresentation holds especially for younger age groups (Dixon & Azocar, 2006). Some authors have noted that this overrepresentation is gradually weakening and that recently minorities are being represented in criminal roles commensurate to their presence in real crime statistics (Mastro & Robinson, 2000). Other studies have stressed, however, that this overrepresentation particularly still holds when news deals with violent crime (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Dixon & Azocar, 2006). Second, research has also assessed the quality of these portrayals by examining how minorities and immigrants are framed in these criminal roles. These images appear to diverge greatly from the way ethnic majority members are depicted in criminal roles. Generally, the consensus is that minorities and immigrants are portrayed in more threatening criminal and violent roles. Moreover, they are often depicted in a more dehumanized and less individualized manner (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Entman, 1992). Studies have shown, for instance, that minorities and immigrants are more likely to be shown in mug shots, to be anonymous, to be physically held in custody, and are less often than ethnic majority members given a voice in order to defend themselves in court (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Entman, 1990, 1992; Mastro & Robinson, 2000). As images of criminals tend to be racially biased, this may create a

cognitive association between crime and immigration, thereby cultivating a stereotype of minorities as more prone to violent forms of criminal behavior (Dixon, 2008; Ford, 1997; Mastro et al., 2009; Oliver, 2003; Welch, 2007). Judgments about crime and ethnic diversity are indeed, to a large extent, intertwined. Respondents, for instance, found black, dark-skinned male perpetrators to be more memorable (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). Moreover, when exposed to stereotypical depictions on television, respondents are more likely to judge perpetrators from the minority group guilty (Ford, 1997) and were more supportive of punitive measures such as the death penalty (Iyengar & Gilliam, 2000). Finally, respondents are more likely to misidentify perpetrators as minorities, especially in stories on violent crime (Oliver & Fonash, 2002). As majority group members believe immigrants and minorities to be overrepresented in crime statistics, this belief may induce anti-immigrant sentiments through an increase in fear of crime levels.

A large majority of these studies, however, focus on the US context, while in Western Europe academic research has hardly assessed the mediating role of fear of crime between television and anti-immigrant sentiments. Still, also in Europe, immigrants are often blamed for causing disorder and committing criminal acts by far-right parties and other actors in society. We therefore believe it is relevant to consider fear of crime and the role of crime reports on television as important elements underlying anti-immigrant sentiments in Western European contexts as well.

### **Audience Traits, Neighborhood Characteristics and Television Type**

In the early years of cultivation theory, television viewing was expected to have a uniform impact on the audience, leading heavy television viewers to believe that the world as depicted on television closely resembles the real world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). This vision, however, has been heavily criticized as it neglects potential confounding factors such as the diverse nature of the audience, real-life indicators and the complexity of the television market. Gradually, this one-dimensional relationship between television viewing and attitudes has been qualified (Chadee & Ditton, 2005; Heath & Gilbert, 1996).

First, studies have shown that the strength of television effects on attitudes is conditional on the type of audience (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Television viewing should

be investigated as a dynamic process where the audience actively interprets the meaning of television messages (Gray & Lotz, 2011). This suggests that television effects may variably impact viewers according to their personal background and experiences. Replication studies investigating the relationship between television consumption and fear of crime, for instance, have found that audience traits such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and previous victimization experiences affect this relationship (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Heath & Gilbert, 1996).

Second, the ‘real-world thesis’ suggests that the relationship between television and attitudes is impacted by objective conditions, such as neighborhood characteristics (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). The underlying rationale is that television’s influence will be weaker if messages are perceived to bear little importance in individuals’ immediate environment, while they may be especially salient if individuals are regularly confronted with a specific mediatized issue in their everyday lives as well. Relevant neighborhood characteristics in our study are real levels of crime and the ethnic composition of the neighborhood (Eschholz et al., 2003; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004).

Third, recently authors have stressed the need to adopt a multidimensional approach while investigating television effects, disentangling the effects of specific television content, type and programs (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; Hooghe, 2002; Newton, 1999; Prior, 2005). Frequently consuming entertainment content and crime drama series may cultivate feelings of fear, while the opposite can be true for information and news programs. Especially the perceived realism and proximity of programs plays a large role. Studies on fear of crime in the US, for instance, found that local news tends to impact attitudes more profoundly as this type of news is perceived to be more ‘realistic’ and relevant to citizens’ immediate environment (Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; Gilliam, Valentino, & Beckmann, 2002; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In addition, especially in Western European contexts we may expect differences between commercial and public broadcasters (Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). Public broadcasters are generally expected to serve the public good (Curran, Iyengar, Brink Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001), and have sometimes explicitly engaged themselves to promote tolerance and to report on increasing ethnic diversity in a balanced manner. Commercial stations, on the other hand, would be mainly guided by profit and audience maximization, which may make this type of stations more inclined to broadcast sensational reports about

crime and immigration. Previous research has shown that public television tends to foster civic attitudes such as social and political trust, and political participation, while these effects have not been documented for commercial television (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Hooghe, 2002; Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). A study investigating the salience of crime issues in the Belgian context, has found that the main commercial broadcaster in Flanders devotes twice as much attention to crime stories than the public broadcaster (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002). Furthermore a recent EU study has shown that public broadcasters – as opposed to commercial broadcasters - indeed retain a public service function as they adhere more carefully to cultural diversity in their program content (Rogers, O’Boyle, Preston, & Fehr, 2014).

## **Hypotheses**

The theory and literature review lead to the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Watching television is positively associated with anti-immigrant sentiments.

**H2:** Watching television is positively associated with perceived ethnic diversity.

**H3:** Watching television is positively associated with fear of crime.

**H4:** A preference for public television is associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime.

**H5:** Perceived ethnic diversity is positively associated with anti-immigrant sentiments.

**H6:** Fear of crime is positively associated with anti-immigrant sentiments.

**H7:** Television consumption patterns are associated with anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime, even when controlling for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics.

## **Data, Method and Measurements**

**Data.** For our analysis, we rely on data from the Social Cohesion Indicators in Flanders (SCIF) survey. The SCIF survey was carried out in 2009 among a representative sample of the adult population in Flanders, i.e. the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium.



This survey was specifically designed to provide an adequate overview of levels and patterns of social cohesion in Flanders. In this survey, 2,085 citizens were questioned in face-to-face interviews on their media use, attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics. The response rate was 54%, which can be considered an average rate for surveys in Belgium (Hooghe, Vanhoutte, & Bircan, 2009). For the analysis only respondents that were born in Belgium and of whom both parents were born in Belgium were included, so that we assess anti-immigrant sentiments among the native majority population. The respondents are nested in 40 randomly selected municipalities, resulting in a hierarchical data structure. The individual-level data is supplemented with real-life indicators at the municipal level. More specifically municipalities' crime and ethnic diversity levels are taken up as neighborhood characteristics. The data on the ethnic diversity of the municipality are derived from the Belgian National Institute of Statistics which is in charge of the official population records. The data on municipalities' crime levels were obtained from the Belgian Federal Police and encompass the registration of criminal activities by both federal and local police forces. Crime statistics of course always to a certain extent underestimate the real occurrence of crime, but the federal police in Belgium has invested extensively in establishing a reliable database on the registration of criminal acts, increasing the validity of the data. It has to be noted here that municipalities in Belgium are rather small, with on average 20,000 inhabitants, so that they can still be considered to constitute a neighbourhood environment. We focus on the local community level because the literature suggests that contextual predictors at the local level are more influential than national-level data (Breetzke & Pearson, 2014).

## Measurements

**Dependent Variable.** The dependent variable, *anti-immigrant sentiments*, is measured as a scale composed of respondents' assessments of three items on immigration, each measured on an eleven-point scale: 'Immigration is good or bad for the Belgian economy'; 'Belgium's cultural life is generally enriched or undermined by immigrants'; 'Immigrants make Belgium a better or a worse place to live' (Schneider, 2007). The unidimensionality of these items is shown by a principal component analysis (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.73, Eigenvalue: 1.95, explained variance: 64.85), confirming the scale's internal consistency and reliability. The scale ranges from zero to ten, where a lower score

indicates lower levels of anti-immigrant sentiments and a higher score indicates higher levels of anti-immigrant sentiments ( $M=4.92$ ,  $SD=1.83$ ).

### **Mediators**

*Perceived percentage of non-Belgians.* This variable refers to the perceived level of ethnic diversity and was operationalized by asking respondents to estimate the percentage of non-Belgians currently living in Belgium. This variable ranges from one percent to ninety-nine percent ( $M=27.18$ ,  $SD=16.74$ ).

*Fear of crime.* To operationalize fear of crime, we have adapted the avoidance behavior scale from the Belgian Security Monitor, which measures the behavioral component of fear of crime (Hooghe et al., 2009). This variable was measured with an assessment on five-point scales, ranging from ‘never’ to ‘very often’, of the following three items: ‘I avoid certain areas in my neighborhood because I think they are not safe’, ‘I avoid to open the door to strangers because I think it is not safe’, ‘I avoid leaving home after dark because I think it is not safe’. The scale proved to be unidimensional (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ : 0.71, Eigenvalue: 2.295, explained variance: 57.39), and ranges from zero to four ( $M=0.58$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ).

### **Independent Variables**

**Television Variables.** The main independent variables in the analysis capture respondents’ patterns in television consumption. The first variable refers to the *amount of time spent watching television* and was measured by asking respondents the following question: ‘How much hours do you spend watching television on an average weekday?’ The answers range from no time at all to 11.5 hours ( $M=2.40$ ,  $SD=1.56$ ). Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferred television station. Respondents had the possibility to choose from a detailed list that included the most frequently watched television stations in Flanders. Both commercial and public stations were listed. The answers were used to construct a dummy variable indicating whether respondents have a *preference for a commercial or public television station* ( $M=0.54$ ). Although this variable thus does not specifically assesses exposure to commercial and television stations, a preference measure is considered more optimal as it reduces possible bias in self-reporting (Prior, 2009). Moreover, statistics show that the answers indeed reflect real market shares

(European Audiovisual Observatory, 2014). Studies in the US have suggested that especially local television is important when studying fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 2000; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In Flanders, however, local television does not primarily focus on crime stories. Moreover, market shares of local television are very limited (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2014). In the sample only 6 respondents indicated to have a preference for local television. Flanders has approximately 6 million inhabitants and covers a small geographical area of 5,221 square miles. Flemish news reports abundantly about domestic affairs, including rather local stories. We therefore assume that the information brought to the audience by regional Flemish broadcasters can be considered sufficiently realistic and proximate for most viewers.

**Audience Traits and Neighborhood Characteristics.** The audience traits included at the individual level concern mostly socio-demographic background variables. *Gender* is included since research has shown that women tend to be more fearful of crime, but also more tolerant towards immigrants (Chiricos et al., 2000; Valentova & Alieva, 2014). Men were coded as 0, and women were coded as 1 ( $M=0.51$ ). *Age* in years is also taken up as a variable ( $M=48.42$ ,  $SD=17.85$ ), because older respondents tend to be more fearful and tend to evaluate immigrants more negatively (Chiricos et al., 2000a; O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2006). Research has also stressed that especially the economically disadvantaged segments of society are more prone to foster anti-immigrant sentiments and fear of crime (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Eschholz et al., 2003). Therefore three variables are included in the analysis to operationalize respondents' objective and subjective socio-economic status: *educational level*, *employment status* and *income satisfaction*. With regard to education respondents were asked about the highest level of education they have completed. This variable has five categories, ranging from 'no education', 'primary education', 'lower secondary education', 'higher secondary education' to 'tertiary education' ( $M=3.08$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ). Second, respondents were asked whether at a certain point in life they have been unemployed for a period of more than six months. This variable is included as a dummy variable in the analysis ( $M=0.15$ ). Third, we also take into account a subjective measurement and include respondents' level of satisfaction with the household income. This variable is measured on a six-point scale ranging from a score of zero ('it is very difficult to live on present household income') to five ('it is very easy

to live on present household income') ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=1.08$ ). Satisfaction with income is to be preferred over actual income data, because of the high proportion of missing answers on this latter question. Other individual-level audience traits that are controlled for in the analysis are *victimization*, *religiosity*, *life satisfaction*, *household structure*, *intergroup friendship* and *left-right self-placement*. Victimization is operationalized as a dichotomous variable referring to 'whether the respondent has been a victim of a criminal act in the last five years' ( $M=0.16$ ). In line with previous research we expect this variable to be positively related to fear of crime (Pickett, Chiricos, Golden, & Gertz, 2012; Quillian & Pager, 2001). Respondents' religiosity is measured by asking respondents which denomination or religion they identify most closely with. This variable was dichotomized and refers to whether respondents consider themselves to be religious or not ( $M=0.49$ ). The literature suggests that religion can be related to attitudes on immigrants and fear of crime, although it is inconclusive on the direction (Bohman & Hjerm, 2013). Self-reported life satisfaction is measured on a scale ranging from zero ('extremely dissatisfied') to ten ('extremely satisfied') ( $M=7.95$ ,  $SD=1.53$ ). Life satisfaction is expected to lower negative feelings such as fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments (Hooghe, 2012; McLaren, 2003). Respondents' household structure is taken up as dichotomous variable referring to a single household or not ( $M=0.12$ ). Intergroup friendship is used as a control variable since research has shown that intergroup contact can lower levels of anti-immigrant sentiments (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In order to operationalize this concept, respondents were asked whether they have friends with other ethnic backgrounds or not ( $M=0.35$ ). Finally, respondents' political left-right orientation was assessed by asking them to place themselves on a left-right scale ranging from zero to ten ( $M=5.37$ ,  $SD=2.09$ ). Having a right-wing orientation is usually associated with attitudes such as anti-immigrant sentiments (McLaren, 2003).

At the municipality level several characteristics have been included that may impact fear of crime, perceived diversity and anti-immigrant sentiments. More specifically, the *ethnic diversity and crime levels* are taken up. In Belgium, ethnic diversity mainly refers to the presence of migrant populations from Turkey and Morocco that have arrived as guest workers and later via family reunification in the 1960s. Measurements of anti-immigrants sentiments show that these sentiments do not have a

bearing on immigrants from neighboring European countries, but specifically refer to immigrants and their descendants from outside Western Europe (Hooghe & de Vroome, forthcoming). The level of ethnic diversity is operationalized as the percentage of Turks ( $M=0.37$ ,  $SD=0.58$ ), Moroccans ( $M=0.36$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ) and Eastern Europeans ( $M=0.91$ ,  $SD=0.80$ ) that are living in the municipality. Also the inflow of foreigners as a percentage of the municipality's population size is included ( $M=0.39$ ,  $SD=0.32$ ). For municipalities' crime levels, the violent crime rate and property crime rate are included in the analysis. These figures are weighted by the municipality size and thus refer to the amount of violent criminal acts and property criminal acts per 1,000 inhabitants.

**Method.** The theoretical model predicts the existence of both direct and indirect relations between patterns in television use and anti-immigrants sentiments. In order to test this theoretical model, we conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) (Kline, 2011). Since the data structure is hierarchical, containing information on individuals (level 1) nested in municipalities (level 2), multilevel structural equation modelling was conducted (Hox, 2010).

## Analysis and Results

**Descriptives.** We first present descriptive data in Table 1. With regard to the dependent variable anti-immigrant sentiments we observe that it is equally spread as respondents tend to be moderate in their evaluations of immigrants. Considering the mediators fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity levels, we can observe several interesting patterns. Respondents do not tend to be very preoccupied about victimization in their neighborhood as can be concluded from the mean fear of crime level. However, respondents tend to systematically and substantially overestimate the percentage of non-Belgians living in the country: on average respondents believe non-Belgians make up more than 27% of the Belgian population. This presents a very large discrepancy compared with real ethnic diversity levels, as in reality only 5.3% of the population is non-Belgian. Even considering the fact that a large proportion of the ethnic minority population has acquired Belgian citizenship, this still represents a huge overestimation of the level of ethnic diversity in Belgium. Considering television consumption, we note that respondents watch about 2.4 hours of television on an average weekday, which is in line

with previous studies. We also see that preference for a particular station is quite evenly balanced between preference for public television stations (54.6%) and for commercial television stations (45.5%). If we consider the neighborhood characteristics, we observe that the percentage of specific immigrant groups living in the neighborhoods included in the analysis is rather limited: on average 0.38% of Moroccans, 0.35% of Turks and 0.91% of eastern Europeans are living in the municipalities. It has to be noted, that there is considerable geographical variation as the larger, more populated municipalities (e.g. the cities of Antwerp and Ghent) have higher levels of ethnic diversity. The average inflow of foreigners is 0.39%, although the same remark on geographical differentiation applies here as well. The average property crime rate is 31.5 per 1000 inhabitants/year and the average violent crime rate is 14.1 per 1000 inhabitants.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables included in the analysis**

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	0	10	4.919	1.830
<i>Mediators</i>				
Fear of crime	0	4	.584	.721
Perceived % non-Belgian	1	99	27.184	16.736
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Hours watching TV	0	11.5	2.401	1.562
Preference for public TV	0	1	.546	
<i>Audience traits</i>				
Gender = Female	0	1	.506	
Age	18	85	48.418	17.846
Education level	0	5	3.084	1.126
Long-term unemployment	0	1	.147	
Income satisfaction	0	5	3.449	1.078
Life satisfaction	0	10	7.946	1.525
Intergroup friendship	0	1	.345	
Religiosity	0	1	.494	
Victimization past five years	0	1	.161	
Left-right self-placement	0	10	5.366	2.094
Single household	0	1	.123	
<i>Neighborhood characteristics</i>				
% Turks	0	2.02	.378	.578
% Moroccans	0	2.53	.355	.664
% Eastern Europeans	.13	3.00	.914	.802
% Inflow foreigners	0	1.80	.389	.316
Property crime rate/1000 inhabitants	9.93	71.23	31.516	17.202
Violent crime rate/1000 inhabitants	3.64	29.72	14.095	6.669

Source: SCIF 2009, National Institute for Statistics and Belgian Federal Police. N=1657.

**Structural Equation Model.** Figure 1 displays the direct and indirect relations between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments. We can observe that, while there is no direct relationship between the amount of time spent watching television and anti-immigrant sentiments, fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity mediate the relationship between the television variables and anti-immigrant sentiments. Frequently watching television is positively related to fear of crime ( $b=.034$ ,  $p<.05$ ), which in turn is positively related to anti-immigrant sentiments ( $b=.319$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition, frequently watching television is positively related to perceived ethnic diversity ( $b=.970$ ,  $p<.001$ ), which in turn is positively related to anti-immigrant sentiments ( $b=.010$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity function as mediators as well between preference for public television and anti-immigrant sentiments. Here we find that a preference for public television is negatively related to both fear of crime ( $b=-.080$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and perceived ethnic diversity ( $b=-4.789$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Moreover, there is also a direct, negative relation between

preference for public television and anti-immigrant sentiments ( $b = -.529$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Figure 1 thus suggests that Hypotheses 2 to 6 are supported.

Table 2 presents a formal test of the total, direct and indirect relationships between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments. These results confirm that the indirect relations via fear of crime and the perceived percentage of non-Belgians are statistically significant.

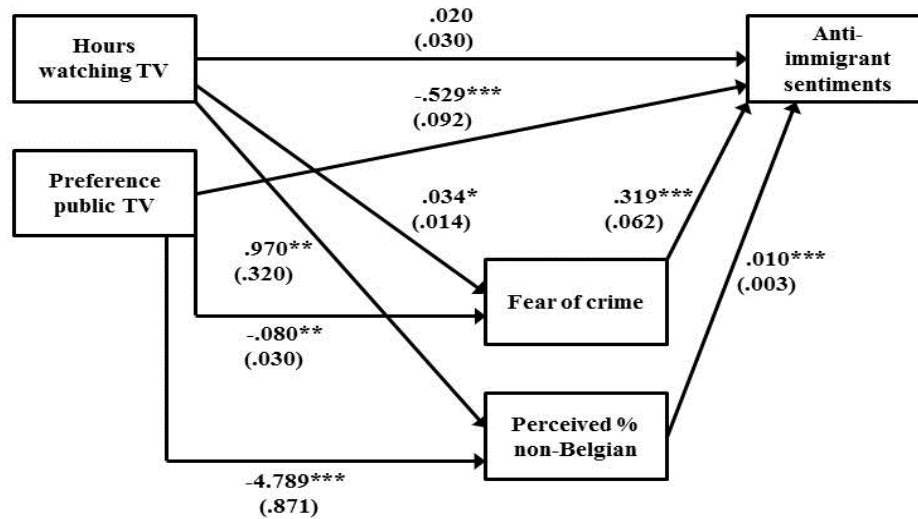
Table 3 shows the hypothesized relations, and includes the model fit statistics. Results show a good fit for the proposed model.  $\chi^2(2) = 1.146$ , ns, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] = 0.000, Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = 1.000.<sup>1</sup> A non-significant Chi Square is generally illustrative of good model fit as the observed covariance matrix is similar to the predicted covariance matrix. The RMSEA refers to the square root of the average. If the RMSEA is zero this represents a very good fit. Finally, the CFI value should be higher than .90 in order to present an adequate fit of the model to the data (Kline, 2011). Our model thus meets all requirements of good model fit.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the RMSEA has a value of 0.000 and the CFI of 1.000 is due to the limited amount of degrees of freedom (2). The Chi Square in the SEM model has a value of 1.14, and when the Chi Square is lower or equal to the degrees of freedom the RMSEA adopts a value of 0 and the CFI of 1. It is thus more informative to consider the value of the Chi Square in this regard and as this value is low and not significant, this suggests a good model fit. Formula  $RMSEA = \sqrt{(\chi^2/df - 1)/(N - 1)}$



**Figure 1. Direct and indirect relations between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments**



Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). Notes: Reported are the unstandardized relations (standard errors in parentheses), results of a SEM analysis in MPLUS.

**Table 2. Specific relationships between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments**

			b	se	p
<i>Effects of time spent watching TV</i>					
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV (Total)	.041	.032	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV (Direct)	.020	.030	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV (Indirect)	.021	.006	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Fear of crime ← Hours watching TV	.011	.006	γ
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Perceived % non-Belgian ← Hours watching TV	.010	.004	*
<i>Effects of preference for public TV channels</i>					
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV (Total)	-.603	.092	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV (Direct)	-.529	.092	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV (Indirect)	-.073	.017	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Fear of crime ← Preference public TV	-.025	.011	*
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Perceived % non-Belgian ← Preference public TV	-.048	.017	**

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$  (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p).

**Table 3. Hypothesized relations between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments**

Path		B	se	p
<i>Hypothesized relations</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Fear of crime	.319	.062	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Perceived % non-Belgian	.010	.003	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Hours watching TV	.020	.030	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Preference public TV	-.529	.092	***
Fear of crime	← Hours watching TV	.034	.014	*
Fear of crime	← Preference public TV	-.080	.030	**
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Hours watching TV	.970	.320	**
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Preference public TV	-4.789	.871	***
<b>Model fit</b>				
Chi <sup>2</sup>		1.146		
DF		2		
CFI		1.000		
RMSEA		.000		
N		1657		

Source: Source: SCIF 2009. \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05 (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p). CFI = Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 4, finally, displays the audience traits and neighborhood characteristics in order to evaluate hypothesis 7. First, we notice that women have lower anti-immigrant sentiments ( $b=-.244$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while older respondents have a more negative attitude towards immigrants ( $b=.010$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Respondents' socioeconomic status is important as well, as especially the lower-educated ( $b=-.265$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and respondents dissatisfied with their household income ( $b=-.066$ ,  $p<.05$ ) evaluate immigrants more negatively. Respondents that are satisfied with their lives on the whole ( $b=-.123$ ,  $p<.001$ ), religious respondents ( $b=-.76$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and respondents that report intergroup friendship relations ( $b=-.678$ ,  $p<.001$ ) are also less prone to hold anti-immigrant sentiments. Political ideology matters, as right-wing respondents ( $b=.122$ ,  $p<.001$ ) evaluate immigrants more negatively. Second, when we examine how audience traits are related to fear of crime, we observe that generally women ( $b=.347$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and older respondents ( $b=.004$ ,  $p<.01$ ) are more fearful. Lower-educated respondents ( $b=-.051$ ,  $p<.001$ ), however, display lower fear of crime levels. Intergroup friendship is also negatively correlated with fear of crime ( $b=-.083$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Finally, religious respondents ( $b=.119$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and respondents recently victimized ( $b=.136$ ,  $p<.01$ ) report higher fear of crime levels. Third, considering perceived ethnic diversity levels, we find that especially women ( $b=8.464$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and young respondents ( $b=-.127$ ,  $p<.001$ ) overestimate ethnic diversity levels. The highly educated ( $b=-2.211$ ,  $p<.001$ ) report lower levels of perceived ethnic diversity, while long-term

unemployed respondents ( $b=1.753$ ,  $p<.10$ ) think ethnic diversity is higher. Finally, right-wing respondents ( $b=.488$ ,  $p<.01$ ) also perceive ethnic diversity levels to be higher, as single-household members do ( $b=2.672$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Next, we examine how neighborhood characteristics are related to anti-immigrant sentiments, fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity. For anti-immigrant sentiments, we find only a weak impact of neighborhood characteristics. Only the percentage of Moroccans that live in the neighborhood is positively correlated with anti-immigrant sentiments ( $b=.291$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The presence of Turks, Eastern Europeans and the inflow of foreigners is not significantly associated with anti-immigrant sentiments. Also real crime levels are not significantly related to anti-immigrant sentiments. For fear of crime, we observe largely the same results. It is interesting again that only the percentage of Moroccans ( $b=.097$ ,  $p<.10$ ) is positively correlated with higher fear of crime levels, although it has to be noted that the significance level is rather high. The presence of Turks, Eastern Europeans and the inflow of foreigners is not significantly correlated with fear of crime levels. Most interesting, however, is the fact that municipalities' real crime levels are not related at all to fear of crime levels. Finally, considering perceived ethnic diversity, we find that the presence of Turks ( $b=2.802$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and Moroccans ( $b=3.336$ ,  $p<.001$ ) in neighborhoods is positively related to perceived ethnic diversity. The presence of Eastern Europeans ( $b=-1.706$ ,  $p<.10$ ) is negatively correlated with the perceived percentage of non-Belgians, but this relation is only borderline significant.

We can thus conclude that, while audience traits are indeed important, neighborhood characteristics are only weakly correlated with perceived ethnic diversity, fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments. The hypothesized relations between television and these attitudes, however, remain intact and this supports hypothesis 7.

**Table 4. Audience traits and neighborhood characteristics for the model of television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments**

Path		B	se	p
<i>Individual level</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Female	-.244	.093	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Age	.010	.003	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Education	-.265	.046	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Long-term unemployment	-.007	.108	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Income satisfaction	-.066	.030	*
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Life satisfaction	-.123	.026	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Intergroup friendship	-.678	.103	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Religiosity	-.273	.101	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Victimization	-.076	.114	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Left-right self-placement	.122	.028	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Single household	-.192	.154	
Fear of crime	← Female	.347	.038	***
Fear of crime	← Age	.004	.001	**
Fear of crime	← Education	-.051	.013	***
Fear of crime	← Long-term unemployment	-.043	.051	
Fear of crime	← Income satisfaction	-.012	.015	
Fear of crime	← Life satisfaction	-.019	.012	
Fear of crime	← Intergroup friendship	-.083	.035	*
Fear of crime	← Religiosity	.119	.030	***
Fear of crime	← Victimization	.136	.043	**
Fear of crime	← Left-right self-placement	.007	.009	
Fear of crime	← Single household	.105	.061	γ
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Female	8.464	.712	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Age	-.127	.024	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Education	-2.211	.404	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Long-term unemployment	1.752	.992	γ
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Income satisfaction	-.173	.377	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Life satisfaction	.041	.251	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Intergroup friendship	-.880	.838	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Religiosity	-.182	.768	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Victimization	.459	1.317	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Left-right self-placement	.488	.167	**
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Single household	2.672	1.329	*
<i>Neighborhood level</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Turks	-.004	.123	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Moroccans	.291	.104	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Eastern Europeans	-.010	.123	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Inflow foreigners	-.074	.175	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Property crime rate	-.005	.012	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Violent crime rate	-.018	.022	
Fear of crime	← % Turks	.097	.094	
Fear of crime	← % Moroccans	.212	.122	γ
Fear of crime	← % Eastern Europeans	-.065	.077	
Fear of crime	← % Inflow foreigners	.074	.121	
Fear of crime	← Property crime rate	.003	.005	
Fear of crime	← Violent crime rate	.008	.009	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Turks	2.802	1.140	*
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Moroccans	3.336	.431	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Eastern Europeans	-1.706	.874	γ
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Inflow foreigners	.223	1.240	

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05, γ p<.10 (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p).

## Discussion

In this paper we examined both the direct and indirect relationships between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments. Our initial expectation was that not real-life conditions, such as real crime and ethnic diversity levels in neighborhoods, influence anti-immigrant sentiments, but that especially perceptions are important. The results of the analysis confirm the hypothesized theoretical model. Frequently watching television is associated with higher fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity levels, which is in turn associated with higher anti-immigrant sentiments. The type of television consumed matters as well, however, as is shown in the analysis on the preferred type of broadcaster: a preference for public stations has a direct negative correlation with anti-immigrant sentiments and is also correlated with lower fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity levels. These correlations were tested under control for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics. Neighborhood characteristics such as municipalities' real crime and ethnic diversity levels, however, only play a minor role in explaining anti-immigrant sentiments, fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity. Audience traits are indeed important as well, but even while accounting for these socio-demographic characteristics, the relation between television and attitudes holds. We can therefore conclude that what matters for evaluating immigrants is mostly the perception of majority group members and these perceptions are heavily influenced by patterns in television consumption. This highlights the role of television as a socialization agent in shaping the immigration debate in Western European societies.

The main contribution of this study is that it sheds light on the exact mechanisms through which television impacts anti-immigrant sentiments. Our results suggest that the influence of watching television is not direct, but rather indirect as it affects other attitudes, i.e. perceived ethnic diversity levels and fear of crime. With regard to perceived ethnic diversity, we can speculate that the television coverage of ethnic diversity prime the immigration topic and prompt worries about future immigration and immigration-related issues. The result is that heavy television viewers hugely overestimate the level of ethnic diversity in their society, and this overestimation renders the feeling of threat more likely. Moreover, the tendency of television to create cognitive associations between immigration and crime makes fear of crime a crucial and powerful factor in impacting anti-immigrant sentiments. The way television reports on immigration and the prevalence

of certain frames in its coverage therefore needs to be further investigated, as – even when real-life indicators suggest otherwise – majority group members tend to believe images constructed by television. What specific kind of media content could be associated with these effects, however, still has to be determined. It is important to note, however, that the crime-related causal mechanism apparently is just as strong in a Western European society as it is in a US context, despite the fact that Western Europe is characterized by lower crime levels and by a different ethnic composition of the population.

Watching television, however, can also lower anti-immigrant sentiments, but our analysis suggests this is dependent upon the type of broadcaster: a preference for public broadcasters proved to be associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime levels. This suggests that public and commercial broadcasters may frame the immigration debate and depict minorities in a different way. This could be explained by the tendency of commercial television to focus mostly on sensational news stories. It has to be kept in mind, however, that the survey did not include measures about actual television viewing behavior. The question about a preference for public or commercial television, still might also reflect social desirability or an overreporting of the more prestigious public television network.

This study has several limitations as well. First, although it presents an advantage that we are able to include real-life crime statistics in the analysis, it should be noted that crime statistics inevitably underestimate the real occurrence of crime. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the Belgian federal police has heavily invested in developing a uniform procedure for reporting and registering criminal acts. Second, our data is geographically limited to Flanders, although the Belgian migration context and media market are not exceptional compared to other countries in Western Europe. Third, we would have preferred to have more detailed data on media use in order to obtain content-specific measures as well. However, due to data limitations, this is not possible. Future studies may therefore want to include more measures on specific types of media use. Fourth and finally, we rely on cross-sectional survey data, which does not permit us to make causal claims with regard to the direction of the relations. Nevertheless, we think it is safe to conclude that future efforts to explain the relation between media content and anti-immigrant sentiments, should also pay attention to the issue of crime and feelings of insecurity. Although this relation has received systematic attention in US-based research,

too often it is neglected in research on European societies. Despite the fact that actual crime levels are much lower in most Western European countries than in the United States, crime and fear of crime do seem to be strongly related to anti-immigrant sentiments in these societies as well and the current analysis suggests that media content does play an important role in this relation.

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## Appendix

**Table A.1**  
**Covariances, residual variances and intercepts for the final model**

		<b>b</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>p</b>
<i>Individual level</i>				
<i>Covariances</i>				
Fear of crime	W. Perceived % non-Belgian	.334	.234	
<i>Residual variances</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments		2.450	.096	***
Fear of crime		.406	.037	***
Perceived % non-Belgian		227.405	10.711	***
<i>Neighborhood level</i>				
<i>Covariances</i>				
Fear of crime	W. Perceived % non-Belgian	.048	.064	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	W. Perceived % non-Belgian	-.194	.180	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	W. Fear of crime	.022	.011	*
<i>Residual variances</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments		.047	.030	
Fear of crime		.022	.012	$\chi^2$
Perceived % non-Belgian		4.582	2.691	$\chi^2$
<i>Intercepts</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments		6.925	.368	***
Fear of crime		.159	.132	
Perceived % non-Belgian		32.817	3.355	***

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ ,  $\chi^2 p < .10$  (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized estimates (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p).

**Table A.2**  
**R-squares final model**

	<b>Estimate</b>
<i>Individual level</i>	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	.246
Fear of crime	.141
Perceived % non-Belgian	.163
<i>Neighborhood level</i>	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	.365
Fear of crime	.598
Perceived % non-Belgian	.527

Source: Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657.